

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6222

As of January 16, 2018

Title: An act relating to expansion of extended foster care eligibility.

Brief Description: Concerning expansion of extended foster care eligibility.

Sponsors: Senators Carlyle, O'Ban, Frockt, Darneille, Walsh, Zeiger, Palumbo, Hasegawa, Billig, Hunt and Kuderer.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/15/18.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Removes the requirement that non-minor dependents must have been in foster care at the age of 18 to be eligible for extended foster care services.
- Increases the maximum age of eligibility for extended foster care services from 19 to 21 years of age for non-minor dependents whose dependency cases are dismissed by the court.
- Authorizes non-minor dependents to unenroll and re-enroll in, and foster youth to re-enter, extended foster care services through a voluntary placement agreement an unlimited number of times if certain criteria are met.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Brandon Popovac (786-7465)

Background: The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) operates the Extended Foster Care (EFC) program, which allows individuals who are dependent and in foster care at age 18 to receive services if that individual is:

- enrolled in a secondary education program or equivalent program;
- enrolled and participating in a postsecondary academic or postsecondary vocational program, or has applied for and can demonstrate an intention to timely enroll in a postsecondary academic or vocational program;

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- participating in a program or activity designed to promote employment or remove barriers to employment;
- engaged in employment for 80 or more hours per month; or
- not able to engage in the above activities due to a documented medical condition.

Continued participation in the EFC program is subject to continuing eligibility in one of these five categories. Participants may transition between categories.

For an eligible youth who chooses to participate in the EFC program on their 18th birthday, the dependency court action will continue. An eligible youth may choose to participate in the EFC program after their 18th birthday and until they turn 19 years old through a voluntary placement agreement with DSHS.

A youth who has received EFC services, but lost their eligibility, may reenter the EFC program one time through a voluntary placement agreement when they meet the criteria again.

The services that youth may receive through the EFC program include: foster care placement or supervised independent living setting placement, medical—including mental health, dental, independent living skills, case management through DSHS, and referrals to community resources.

In October 2017, 615 youth were receiving EFC services.

Summary of Bill: A requirement for non-minor dependents to have been in foster care at the age of 18 to be eligible for EFC services is eliminated.

The maximum age of eligibility for EFC services is increased from 19 to 21 years of age for non-minor dependents whose dependency cases are dismissed by the court.

Non-minor dependents may unenroll and re-enroll in, and foster youth may re-enter, the EFC program through a voluntary placement agreement an unlimited number of times if certain criteria are met.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 10, 2018.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Youth who turn 18 and drop out of the EFC program may regret that decision, thus the need for an extra level of support. Despite an indeterminate fiscal impact, legislative leadership is committed to youth in the foster care system. Providing flexibility for this age group is vital. There are likely fiscal ramifications for not providing EFC services if a youth unenrolls and reenrolls in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program later in life.

Our state has been a national model for EFC services and has another chance to be a national model. A Washington state pilot program influenced and was included in the federal match component of the federal Fostering Connections to Success Act. Research shows that EFC services have a positive return on investment for the taxpayer. Frequent unenrollment or reenrollment in the EFC program is unlikely since the youth would face more risks by opting out of the EFC program. Research shows that EFC program participation reduces frequency of crime compared to peers, delays early parenting, and leads to engagement in one to two years of college, which positively impacts future earnings.

Without EFC services and a GED attainment, foster youth might be motivated to move out of state for the wrong reasons and would not have access to any support systems in place. The EFC program helps youth with the transition to adulthood by providing a safety net. EFC services are still needed for youth who turn 18 while in a JRA placement or in a trial return-home placement. State dependent youth will benefit from EFC services.

Since 2008, and passage of the federal foster care act, only a few groups of youth have been able to qualify for EFC services. It would be beneficial to extend EFC services to a larger sector of dependent and foster youth.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Reuven Carlyle, Prime Sponsor; Jim Theofelis, A Way Home Washington; Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children; Azia Ruff, The Mockingbird Society.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.